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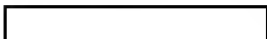
Central Intelligence Bulletin

CONTENTS



25X1

USSR - Middle East: USSR maintains Israeli withdrawal must be first step in Middle East settlement.

 (Page 3)

25X1



25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2004/03/11 : CIA-RDP79T00975A012800050003-2

Next 2 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2004/03/11 : CIA-RDP79T00975A012800050003-2

25X1

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USSR - MIDDLE EAST: THE USSR STILL MAINTAINS THAT ISRAELI AGREEMENT TO WITHDRAW MUST BE THE FIRST STEP IN A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, AND THAT A SOVIET-US UNDERSTANDING MIGHT PROVIDE THE IMPETUS TO BREAK THE ARAB-ISRAELI DEADLOCK.

25X1

25X1

A SOVIET DIPLOMAT, [REDACTED] GAVE UNDERSECRETARY ROSTOW A DOCUMENT ON 19 DECEMBER WHICH SUPPORTS THE CURRENT ARAB BARGAINING POSITION AND OFFERS NO SUGGESTIONS FOR POSSIBLE ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. THE SOVIETS CONTINUE TO FAVOR IMPLEMENTING THE RESOLUTION OF 22 NOVEMBER 1967 IN STAGES, ACCORDING TO AN AGREED TIMETABLE. MOSCOW HAS SUGGESTED TO THE ARABS, AS WELL AS THE US, ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THE USSR AND THE US SHOULD HELP THE PROTAGONISTS IN DRAWING UP SUCH A PLAN, AND DID SO MORE EXPLICITLY THAN EVER BEFORE IN THE 19 DECEMBER DOCUMENT.

UNLIKE EARLIER SOVIET DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES, HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO MENTION OF A FOUR-POWER SCHEME TO REACH A SETTLEMENT. THE SOVIET DEMARCHE TO THE US, THE UK, AND FRANCE IN SEPTEMBER CALLED FOR SUCH AN APPROACH. ALSO, THE SOVIET DIPLOMAT ATTEMPTED TO DISSOCIATE MOSCOW FROM LAST MONTH'S STATEMENTS BY AMBASSADOR DOBRYNIN, AS WELL AS DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER SEMENOV, AGREEING TO "MINOR RECTIFICATIONS" OF ARAB-ISRAELI BORDERS.

A SOVIET INITIATIVE AT THIS TIME IS DESIGNED NOT ONLY TO ASSIST FUTURE EFFORTS OF UN EMISSARY JARRING, BUT TO INVOLVE THE US IN DISCUSSIONS OF A MAJOR WORLD PROBLEM WHILE THE INAUGURATION OF A NEW US ADMINISTRATION IS IMMINENT. MOREOVER, THE SOVIETS ARE STILL TRYING TO GENERATE GREATER US PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO BE MORE CONCILIATORY. THE ARRIVAL OF SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO IN CAIRO ON 21 DECEMBER FOR A "BRIEF" VISIT SUGGESTS THAT MOSCOW MAY ALSO BE TRYING TO CONVINCE THE ARABS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS.

THE PRELIMINARY REACTION OF ISRAELI DIPLOMATS IN THE US TO THE SOVIET NOTE WAS NEGATIVE. THEY INDICATED SOME INTEREST IN WHETHER A REFERENCE BY THE SOVIETS TO A "JURIDICAL DOCUMENT" MEANT A

23 Dec 68

Central Intelligence Bulletin

3

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25X1

''PEACE TREATY,'' BUT DESCRIBED THE NOTE AS A WHOLE AS ''OLD HAT,'' WITH THE ONLY CLEAR POINT BEING THE NEED FOR ISRAEL TO WITHDRAW.

THE SOVIET MOVE SEEMS LIKELY, HOWEVER, TO ADD TO EXISTING UNCERTAINTIES IN ISRAEL RAISED RECENTLY BY GOVERNOR SCRANTON'S SUGGESTIONS OF A MORE ''EVEN-HANDED'' US POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND BY FRANCE'S ESPOUSAL OF THE NEED FOR AN IMPOSED FOUR-POWER SETTLEMENT.

WHILE STANDING FIRM ON THEIR DEMANDS FOR A SETTLEMENT, THE ISRAELIS CAN BE EXPECTED TO GIVE NEW STRESS TO THE CONTINUATION OF THE JARRING MISSION.

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